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BOOK REVIEW

The Vast Enquiring Soul: Explorations into the Further Reaches of Consciousness, by Ronald Russell, MA

Reviewed by Shirley Bliley

Ronald Russell defines consciousness as “our ability to know and understand, to be aware of ourselves and the world around and beyond us.” He takes as his subject all circumstances in which our consciousness moves into altered states and seems to extend its reach beyond material reality into other realms. His stated intention: to present evidence showing that “consciousness is not located anywhere, either within the brain or without.” “The work and personality of the late Robert Monroe” and Monroe programs are acknowledged as inspiration. The extraordinary experiences of ordinary individuals—usually discounted by established science—are the foundation of his case. The undeniable fact that so many “have experienced some sort of mystical encounter” suggests to Russell that “perhaps it is time to drop the word ‘paranormal’ altogether.” Approaching consciousness studies from a personal perspective allows one to explore rather than explain and “sometimes see round corners when others may see only straight ahead.”

Russell addresses with gusto the core issue of how mind may influence matter and transcend space and time. Psychokinesis, telepathy, premonition, precognition, déjà vu, and remote viewing are scrutinized. He recounts the prevalence of such experiences, both historical and present day, and points out the success of remote viewing conducted by strict protocols and the rigorously researched evidence for ESP and psychokinesis. Russell theorizes that distant healing, which affects a person without physical contact with the healer, might also be a variant of telepathic communication. All of these experiences “fit neatly into the concept of the non-locality of consciousness” and validate what most of us already knew intuitively.

The near-death experience (NDE) is considered from the perspective of those who have “been there; done that” and researchers who accept that perception

can occur independently of the physical senses, as well as those who find the notion extremely unpalatable.

Russell says, “However we interpret the NDE... it adds to our understanding of consciousness as being able to function unrestricted by time and space... above all, the NDE is a personal experience.” The out-of-body experience emerges as yet another dramatic affirmation that consciousness can evade the constraints of space/time. “It was as if you were floating in warm, soft clouds where nothing exists as a separate piece of matter,” said Robert Monroe of one of his OBEs. This type of “paranormal” event also turns out to be surprisingly common. Monroe is credited with providing “a consensus view of the out-of-body state” and with taking a matter-of-fact approach to out-of-body travel that contributed to its demystification.

Communication with the “unbodied” and its implications receive in-depth consideration. Russell takes us on an odyssey ranging from biblical prophecy, through the “auditory hallucinations” of the mentally disturbed, to the “voices” heard by the dying, to spiritualism and finally modern channeling.

Then he personalizes the whole spectrum with the reminder that “...most of us in a variety of situations have heard ourselves say something pertinent or even profound without any forethought...” The reader gets name, rank, and serial number for an impressive array of writers, philosophers, scientists, and academicians who have something to say about possible survival of physical death, plus an overview of the premises central to *LIFELINE*®. Of all the threads in this narrative, transcendence, which catapults the “separate” self into a state of fusion with all that is, seems closest to Russell’s heart. His examination of the phenomenon is replete with examples drawn from the lives of authors, housewives, physicists, philosophers, astronauts, poets, scientists, *GATEWAY VOYAGE*® participants, and even death-and-dying authority Elisabeth Kubler-Ross. Religious transcendent events also receive careful consideration. Russell concludes that what matters most may be “not the category, but the effect—is it life-changing?” Such occurrences characteristically come unbidden, abruptly dissolving the barrier between the experiencer and the rest of reality and revealing that said barrier is illusory in any event. Russell makes quite an impressive case for his major premise: subjective experiences such as ESP, telepathy, precognition, psychokinesis, NDEs, OBEs, and the transcendent

moment, as well as abilities such as remote viewing, distant healing, and channeling are reliable doorways into the dimensions in which consciousness reigns supreme. He urges us to embrace a “Wholeness Science” and postulates that recent genomic and neurological discoveries will have a profound, positive influence on understanding consciousness. Russell maintains that the desire to explore is “soul-inspired.” His arguments are closely reasoned and the plethora of personal accounts and academic references make key resources readily accessible. If you truly hunger to know, be assured that there is quality nourishment here for your own “vast enquiring soul.”

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